

**CALIFORNIA BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE**  
**Minutes of the March 23-24, 2006 Meeting**  
**San Francisco, California**

Justice Carlos Moreno, Chair, called the meeting to order at 11 a.m. on Thursday, March 23, 2006, at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) in San Francisco, California.

**Commission Members Present:** Hon. Carlos R. Moreno (*Chair*), Ms. Mary Ault, Hon. Karen Bass, Mr. Lawrence B. Bolton, Hon. John Burton, Mr. Curtis L. Child, Ms. Miryam J. Choca, Mr. Joseph W. Cotchett, Mr. Michael Cunningham (*absent on March 24, 2006*), Hon. Kathryn Doi Todd, Dr. Jill Duerr Berrick, Hon. Leonard P. Edwards, Mr. Raul A. Escatel, Ms. Deborah Escobedo, Hon. Terry B. Friedman, Hon. Richard D. Huffman, Hon. Susan D. Huguenor, Ms. Terri Kook, Ms. Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Mr. Will Lightbourne, Ms. Donna C. Myrow, Hon. Michael Nash, Mr. David Neilsen, Ms. Diane Nunn, Mr. Ken Patterson, Mr. Derek Peake, Ms. Linda Penner, Mr. Anthony Pico, Ms. Pat Reynolds-Harris, Ms. Maria D. Robles, Ms. Jennifer Rodriguez, Dr. David Sanders, Mr. Gary C. Seiser, Mr. Alan Slater, Mr. Joseph L. Spaeth, Hon. Todd Spitzer, and Hon. Dean T. Stout.

**Commission Members Not Present:** Hon. Michael D. Antonovich, Hon. Richard C. Blake, and Hon. Darrell S. Steinberg,

**Commission Staff:** Christopher Wu (*Lead*) and Carolynn Castaneda

**Item 1            Welcome and Introduction of Members** (*see copy of attached remarks*)

Justice Moreno, Chair, and Mr. Christopher Wu, lead staff, welcomed commission members. Justice Moreno gave brief opening remarks. Members and staff made introductions including their affiliations and connection to foster care.

**Item 2            The Foster Care Experience in California**

Commissioner Jennifer Rodriguez, Policy Director for California Youth Connection, an organization of current and former foster youth in California, and Commissioner Anthony Pico, a current foster youth who is also a member of California Youth Connection and serves as a liaison in San Francisco County, shared their foster care experiences and perspectives. Digital videos relating the stories of current and former foster youths, including that of Commissioner Rodriguez, were shown.

**Item 3            Setting the Context: The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care**

Mr. William C. Vickrey, Administrative Director of the Courts, on behalf of Chief Justice Ronald M. George and members of the Judicial Council expressed appreciation of the members’

commitment and willingness to serve on the commission. Mr. Vickrey described the Judicial Council, which is a 27-member policymaking body of California's court system.

Mr. Vickrey proudly served as a commissioner on the nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. The Pew Commission, launched in May 2003 was sponsored by the Georgetown University Public Policy Institute with grant support from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The panel, which included some of the nation's leading child welfare experts, was charged with developing practical, evidence-based recommendations related to federal financing and court oversight of child welfare to improve outcomes for children in foster care.

In particular, the Pew Commission sought to investigate and offer comprehensive recommendations in two targeted areas:

- Improving existing federal financing mechanisms to facilitate faster movement of children from foster care into safe, permanent families and to reduce the need to place children in foster care.
- Improving court oversight of child welfare cases to facilitate better and more timely decisions related to children's safety, permanence, and well-being.

Members viewed a 15-minute video from the Pew Commission that stressed the importance and urgency of improving the foster care system. Mr. Vickrey reviewed the goals and charge of the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care and presented the resolution to the commission. The commission will be seeking input from a broad range of interested individuals, advocacy groups, judicial officers, and court staff, as well as members of the Legislature and executive branch.

#### **Item 4            Commission structure**

Mr. Wu described the planned commission subcommittees and identified the chairs of each. Subcommittees will meet by phone and/or in person between commission meetings and will make recommendations to the full commission. Mr. Wu asked commissioners to rank their preferences for subcommittee assignment but informed them that staff would also need to seek balance in the subcommittees' membership. The four subcommittees were described as follows:

*Strengthening Court Oversight (Justice Richard Huffman, Chair).* This subcommittee will study the role of juvenile courts in the child welfare system and will generate recommendations as to how court policies and procedures can be amended to improve the timeliness and quality of outcomes for foster children.

*Stable and Appropriate Funding and Resources (Judge Susan Huguenor, Chair).* This subcommittee will consider measures to ensure adequate resources are available to reach the goals for families set by the courts, child welfare agencies, and the commission.

*Strategies and Accountability for Reducing Number of Children in Foster Care and Establishing Permanent and Safe Placements (Judge Michael Nash, Chair).* This subcommittee will consider

current and future initiatives to ensure accountability by courts and agencies throughout the foster care system on both the local and state levels.

*Effective Case Management and Data Exchange Systems (Judge Dean Stout, Chair).* This subcommittee will explore case management and data needs in courts and agencies and effective communication and sharing of data between systems.

Staff will contact the subcommittee chairs to arrange a conference call to discuss the role of the subcommittees, review topic descriptions, and prioritize issues for the subcommittees to consider.

[Commissioners Todd Spitzer and David Sanders arrived in the afternoon and made their introductions to the commission].

#### **Item 5            System Overview:**

Commissioner Huffman gave a brief overview of the structure of the California judicial branch, including the Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC), and the trial and appellate courts. Commissioner Huguenor described the role of the Judicial Council's Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee.

Commissioner Ault described the roles of the federal and state governments in child welfare funding and practice. Commissioner Patterson reviewed county child welfare organizational structure, budgets, services, and staffing, as well as major initiatives.

#### **Item 6            Future Meetings Schedule and Brief Items:**

Commissioner Burton discussed his new foundation, Children Without Homes (*as he was unable to attend the Friday session*).

Commissioner Krinsky sought volunteers for the June 5, 2006 special event at the Youth Summit at Occidental College in Los Angeles.

Possible dates for future meetings beginning in June 2006 were discussed. The June 15–16, 2006, meeting will be held in San Francisco. Members were asked to note future meetings.

The commission anticipated releasing the final report to the Judicial Council at Beyond the Bench in December 2007. At the March 2008 Statewide Summit of County Teams, local and regional action planning teams will meet to create permanent commissions.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

**Friday, March 24, 2006**

Justice Carlos Moreno, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, March 24, 2006, at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).

The commission has had favorable news coverage. Justice Moreno, Commissioner Pico, and several other commissioners were interviewed by reporters from KTVU Channel 2, National Public Radio, and the San Diego Union-Tribune.

**Item 1            California—What We Know and What We Don't Know** (*See chart on Tab H*)

Mr. Don Will, Ms. Mara Bernstein and Ms. Iona Mara-Drita of the AOC's Center for Families, Children, & the Courts presented on the recent *California Dependency Court Improvement Program Reassessment*, the most comprehensive study of dependency courts ever undertaken in California. Judges Huguenor, Nash, Stout, and Edwards, Ms. Krinsky, and Dr. Barbara Needel were thanked for their assistance in the study. The reassessment found progress in many areas of dependency court, including legal representation for children, the experience and training of judicial officers, the judicial officer's satisfaction with the work of attorneys and social workers, and collaboration between the courts and the child welfare system. Areas identified as continued barriers to improvement include delays in hearings, high caseloads, and the lack of computerized information systems. The reassessment makes 26 recommendations for court improvement, and can be found at <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/pdffiles/CIPReassessmentRpt.pdf>. The discussion included building statewide case management systems, collaboration with the child welfare system in sharing information, collaboration with other stakeholders such as mental health and education, and focusing on meaningful participation of children in dependency court.

Dr. Needel, with the University of California at Berkeley's Center for Social Services Research, presented recent information from the Child Welfare Services case management system and an update on the Assembly Bill 636 quality improvement process. Dr. Needell discussed the use of data in describing and assessing the foster care system.

**Recommendations for the Next Commission Meeting**

- A report on the DRAFT program, which provides funding and training for dependency representation and is designed to address caseloads, quality of representation, and other issues in dependency cases.
- A report on the Court Appointed Special Advocate program, which provides volunteer advocates for children in dependency cases; possible advantages and means of increasing the availability of CASA representation throughout the state.
- Update on funding in the delinquency and dependency systems and how to fund expansion of services.

## **Commission Action**

Justice Moreno agreed in concept with each of the commissioners' recommendations, and noted that adequate funding to the courts for resources must also be addressed.

## **Item 2            Assembly Select Committee**

Commissioner Bass described the Select Committee on Foster Care, which was created to provide a forum to discuss, review, and debate public policy on California's child welfare system.

She summarized current issues and key legislative efforts on foster care reform currently underway. This legislative package reflects the consensus of numerous advocacy groups and the select committee. Select committee members will carry various measures on foster care – co-author and support bills as a package. One objective of the committee is to have foster care become a priority of the Democrat and Republican caucuses.

The committee will consider, in particular, the following areas:

- Development of statewide centralized leadership and collaboration;
- Challenges and hurdles facing relative caregivers;
- Critical needs of teens in foster care, crossover youth, and emancipation; and
- Critical role and importance of the court and legal process.

## **Item 3            Current Initiatives in California and Nationally (*See Tab I of the binder*)**

### *California Connected by 25 Initiative (Commissioner Kook)*

This program about youth in the juvenile justice system, the school and foster care system to be able to connect in order to be productive and vital with Alameda, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Stanislaus, and Fresno counties. The program's activities and outputs include:

- Employment/training/post secondary education
- Financial competency/security
- Housing
- K–12 education
- lifelong connections/personal and social asset development
- child welfare agency infrastructure

### *The California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care (Commissioner Kook)*

With support from the Stuart Foundation, two California nonprofits—Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc., and the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning—have joined forces to both model and promote greater collaboration between the public education and child welfare sectors to improve the education outcomes of children and youth in foster care. While child welfare has begun to focus on this issue, the education sector has had less opportunity to address educational barriers and solutions. The collaborative includes representatives from these two organizations as well as a Design Team that will serve as a steering committee for the collaborative's work.

#### *Guardian Scholars Program*

This program provides support on college campuses to former foster youths.

#### *Casey Family Programs (Commissioner Choca)*

This program focuses on integrating philanthropic efforts and co-investment into the future and sustainability of government family programs.

#### *California Permanency for Youth Project (Commissioner Reynolds-Harris)*

This project of the Public Health Institute began in January 2003 with a five-year grant awarded by the Stuart Foundation. This grant has since been extended through 2009. It's goal is to achieve permanency for older children and youth in California so that no youth leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a caring adult.

#### *Home At Last (Commissioner Krinsky)*

Supported through a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, Home At Last is a joint project of Occidental College and the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles. The mission of Home At Last is to support outreach and educational efforts, both nationally and in targeted states, that encourage action on the Pew Commission's recommendations. Home At Last conducts research, issues policy briefs, and partners with state and national organizations with a goal of enhancing awareness and providing education to policymakers, judicial leaders and other stakeholders about the need to address the challenges facing children in foster care.

#### *NCJFCJ Model Courts (Judges Edwards and Nash)*

This national organization based in Reno, Nevada, works in family and juvenile courts. It focuses on child abuse and neglect, delinquency, family law, and family violence. The organization's mission is to provide training to judges, technical assistance to the courts, and research. It seeks to contribute to the development of national policy affecting children and families at risk.

About 10 years ago, the NCFCJ published the Resource Guidelines for child abuse and neglect cases, describing best practices and the handling of cases in this area. The Guidelines have had a profound effect both nationally and within California. Last summer, the NCFCJ published delinquency guidelines. Other initiatives of the NCFCJ include model courts, which have developed such programs as Adoption Saturday to promote finalization of adoptions and visitation guidelines to ensure appropriate and positive use of visitation in dependency cases.

#### *Pilot Counties—Commissioner Ault*

Commissioner Ault described the Child Welfare System Improvement Pilot Counties, in which eleven volunteer counties develop innovative ways of reallocating existing funding streams in order to provide better services to at-risk youth and families. Lessons learned from the pilot counties could later be applied statewide.

#### **Item 4            Other Business**

Justice Moreno thanked the commission members for devoting their time and effort to this important project and the AOC staff for their dedication and presentations. Staff will follow up

on suggestions and topics that have been raised by the commission. The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

*\*DRAFT for approval by the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care*